

new to his responsibilities, to the practice that followed those cases. In each of those cases, when a question arose as to the propriety of the conduct of a minister of the Crown, the minister involved offered his resignation to the Prime Minister, and in each of those cases that resignation was accepted.

There has been an indication by the minister that he would be prepared to have the matter considered by a standing committee of the House of Commons. I think that that should be done. I believe that a matter of this kind, which obviously raises questions about the capacity of a minister of the Crown to carry on his responsibilities effectively and free of conflict, is a matter of the utmost seriousness and deserves consideration by a standing committee.

● (1540)

I say with some sadness and considerable seriousness that the minister should also recognize that so long as there is a question in the minds of the House of Commons and the people of Canada about the degree to which he was operating free of conflict, then it is incumbent upon him to follow the steps of certain of his colleagues in the present government and offer his resignation for at least the period embraced by the inquiry by a standing committee of this House.

I say this because it is obviously of some importance to the minister himself. If it were not important, he would not have raised the matter as a question of privilege in the House of Commons. I say simply that if it is a matter of sufficient importance to the minister that he would raise it as a question of privilege in the House of Commons, then it follows that it is a matter of sufficient importance that he should follow consistently the attitudes of some of his new colleagues in cabinet and step aside from ministerial responsibility for the period, which we hope will be limited and brief, of an inquiry by a standing committee of the House of Commons.

My recollection of the statements that were made by certain of his colleagues when they were in similar situations and faced conflicts between their private activities and their public responsibilities is that at least one of them and perhaps several indicated there would be the kind of questioning arise until the matter was resolved, that there would be the kind of worry and preoccupation involved that would be inconsistent with the effective carrying out of ministerial responsibilities. I think that that same argument exists in the case of the minister here involved.

I suggest this would be the honourable and the proper course for the minister, since he has raised this question which is obviously of deep concern to him, this question of a potential conflict of interest, a conflict not simply between himself and the government generally but between himself and the department of which he is minister. Because as I understand the statement, it was his department which was involved in the relations with the hotel in which he had a profitable interest. If it is important enough to have the matter raised as a question of privilege, then the course of honour for the minister would be to stand aside from the ministry for at least the period of investigation by the standing committee of this House.

*Privilege—Mr. Axworthy*

I urge the minister to follow through with his offer and move a reference to the standing committee. I suggest to him also that he offer his resignation to the Prime Minister, which I hope the Prime Minister will accept for at least the period of the inquiry to which he has referred.

**Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Madam Speaker, it is not my purpose to pass judgment on the minister or on others who have raised this issue in the House. However, it seems that the request of the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy), if I may call it a request, is one to which we ought to agree. I think it is incumbent upon the House to have this matter cleared up. We do not seem to be getting it cleared up by questions and answers on the floor of the House of Commons. I believe it would be a good idea for the matter to be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Your Honour may feel that you would like to reserve judgment on it to decide whether or not there is a prima facie case of privilege, but now with a spokesman from each of the three parties in the House saying we would be satisfied, perhaps it could be resolved right now.

I may say, Madam Speaker, that if you do find that the minister has a case or privilege and if the motion is put, I do not think debate on it is necessary. The important thing to happen is for it to go to a committee to be examined thoroughly.

**Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, may I direct your attention to a similar question of privilege that was raised on May 14, 1970, by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), who had made an application to purchase land over which the then minister of Indian affairs and northern development had jurisdiction. At that time he sought consent on a motion to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

After the Speaker ruled there was a prima facie case of privilege, the House gave unanimous consent to refer the matter to that committee. After hearing the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), and after the generous offer made by the minister, there would obviously be no objection on this side of the House, if you should find there is a prima facie case of privilege, to referring the matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

**Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon):** Madam Speaker, I would not have risen to participate in this discussion if it were not for the reference just made to me in the context that this discussion has taken place. I want hon. members to know that the reference to which the House leader just referred had nothing to do with conflict of interest. That case had to do with the provision in a government drafted agreement for sale which prohibited any member of Parliament from purchasing a piece of Crown-owned land. It had nothing to do with conflict.

It was decided by the standing committee that members of Parliament had the same right to purchase Crown-owned land